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SUBJECT: SOLIDARITY LEADER MILOV DISCUSSES UPCOMING
ELECTIONS, FUTURE

1. (U) Summary: Leading member of Solidarity and candidate for Moscow City Duma Vladimir Milov outlined for us his election platform and personal vision for the movement. Milov predicted overwhelming victory for ruling United Russia in city elections. He expects to lose election for his district but hopes to capture 20 percent of the vote and retain influence and personal political capital. He foresaw that the financial crisis would lead to tension within United Russia and popular disillusionment with government at the national level, allowing Solidarity to compete successfully in elections in Moscow and St. Petersburg at some point in the future. End Summary.

City Duma Elections

2. (U) Milov told us August 13th that he expects 25 to 30 percent turnout for Moscow city elections, a majority of which will be older voters focused on quality-of-life issues.

There is little appeal for a broader campaign platform of comprehensive democratic change. Milov is running electoral district 13 to the South of Moscow, his home of 26 years. A well-known and well-regarded economist, he is arguing for aggressive measures to combat the financial crisis, a major issue for opposition parties seeking to disparage United Russia. Recognizing that by virtue of political intrigue or merely age Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov may leave politics before the next mayoral election, and that the city Duma would then appoint a successor, he has gained political traction by pointing out that the Duma would select a replacement, not citizens through direct voting. A United Russia-controlled Duma would confirm a close Medvedev or Putin associate nominated from St Petersburg instead of a Muscovite, Milov argued. Milov hopes to earn 20 percent of the vote, and would call that a success.

Focus on Moscow and St Petersburg

3. (U) Based on his visits to 35 Russian regions in the last 18 months, Milov remains deeply pessimistic about the opportunity for Solidarity to attract support. Media latched on to the political unrest in Vladivostok in late 2008 as an opportunity for opposition parties to make electoral inroads.

Instead, Milov argued, the situation is just the opposite. Local workers were striking out against the federal government, but were not attacking President Putin in spite of some placards calling for his resignation. Reminiscent of petitions to the Tsar, the protestors requested that Putin intervene on their behalf with the corrupt bureaucracy. Solidarity has never successfully backed a regional protest because locals are

wary of any political involvement. This fact, and weak finances, have almost completely confined the movement's electoral viability to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Milov sees no chance that a legitimate challenge to United Russia can come from the provinces.

Future of Solidarity

¶4. (SBU) Acknowledging that no Solidarity candidate is likely to win election in Moscow, Milov maintained outward optimism about the future of the party in the long term. He sees himself as one of a cadre of strong leaders of a movement with no real activist base. Though the movement has approximately 900 members, he estimates that only 50 to 60 are actively working to promote it in Moscow. While leadership may envision a future as elected members of government, Solidarity as a potential political party has little popular support. The movement appears to be in stasis, waiting for a time undetermined when the economic crisis lowers approval ratings for United Russia and individual Solidarity leaders are able to gain office. Milov predicts that Solidarity could one day appeal to 20 to 30 percent of federal voters and join a coalition government.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Milov identifies himself as an individual - with vision and supporters - who is "affiliated" with Solidarity. He suggested that association with Solidarity is not always personally useful. There is no internal discussion, he observed, of the movement coalescing into a registered political party, due in part to its depleted financial resources and a genuine lack of appeal to the general public. Milov aims to maintain his public standing

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in Moscow and St. Petersburg and capture enough of the vote in his district to remain a serious player within Solidarity. The movement as a whole, however, plans to tread water and wait for United Russia to fall in public opinion polls. Without funding or public interest, it is unclear how Milov expects Solidarity to build a grass roots base over the coming years. End Comment.
Beyrle